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TWO POPULAR RELIGIOUS POEMS IN THE AZERBAIJANI DIALECT

Clara C. Edwards

Hamadan, Persia

The strong poetic spirit of the Persians finds an opportunity for expression in the month of Moharram, when all Shiah Mohammedans mourn the death of Imam Hussein, with his seventy followers, on the plain of Kerbela. During the first ten days of the month, meetings are held every evening in mosques and private houses, where weeping companies listen to recitations of the life and death of the martyrs, embroidered with an infinite variety of fantastic legend. On Ashura, the tenth day of the month, a play portraying the whole tragedy of Kerbela is produced in the courtyards of the mosques. In all these plays and recitations, poetry has a prominent part. At the evening meetings, a *rūz-i-khān*[1] ('reciter of misfortunes') often tells the story in a poetic version of his own; or he will declaim a famous poem—perhaps the lament of Hussein's wife Zeinab over the death of her husband. The passion-play is all in poetry and is constantly changing. There are set speeches in Persian and Arabic for the principal characters, but the minor parts are changed from year to year and from place to place at the will of the producers of the play.

In Tabriz, although the people speak a dialect of Turkish called Azerbaijani, the poetry of the *rūz-i-khānīs* and of the plays is Persian, a language of greater dignity than that used by the people. There is, however, a large body of popular Azerbaijani poetry composed for use at this time. During the first days of Moharram, the streets are crowded with religious processions: confused masses of men and boys beating their breasts with their hands or their backs with steel chains, and cutting their foreheads with knives, and others dressed to represent characters in the tragedy of Kerbela. Nearly all are shouting or chanting. A procession is arranged from each district of the city, and every year the different districts vie with one another in the composition of new poems in Azerbaijani to be recited as their processions march through the streets. Sometimes one of these poems will catch the fancy of the crowd and will become a feature of the processions, familiar to all and recited year by year. When I was in Tabriz in the autumn of 1915, I noted down two which had thus become popular. I give the words of the original in Roman letters, as I took them from the mouth of a Tabrizi *Mirza,* rendering his pronunciation as closely as I can.

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[1] روضة خوان; this word, in universal use, is a corruption of رزية خوان.

I. ZŪL JENAH

Zūl Jenāḥ ('the Two-Winged') was Imam Hussein's favorite horse. It had belonged to Mohammed himself, who left it to Ali, from whom it was handed down to Hassan and to Hussein. On the tragic day of Kerbela, when all his followers had been killed, Hussein mounted Zūl Jenāḥ and rode out alone against his enemies. He slew great numbers of them, but in the end was overcome by his wounds and fell from his horse. Zūl Jenāḥ stood by its master's body and, lowering its head, dipped its mane and forelock in the Imam's blood. It then galloped off to the place of the tents, where the women and children were waiting for the outcome of the battle. By neighing and nodding its head toward the place where Hussein lay, it conveyed the news of his death.

In the procession, Zūl Jenāḥ is represented by a white horse covered with a red-spotted white cloth. (The red spots, of course, represent the blood from the wounds of Hussein.) The horse is accompanied by a number of men who recite the following verses, gazing at it with expressions of deepest grief and anxiety. After the recitation of the poem, they gather about the horse to stroke and fondle it.

Nădăn sheihĕ chĕkĕrsĕn	Why do you neigh,
Gūz meidānĕ tĕkĕrsĕn	Why do you fix your eye on the field of battle,
Măgăr bābām ülüb di	Unless our father is dead?
Sĕnna qurbān Zul Jĕnāh	May we be your sacrifice, Zūl Jenāḥ!

Nădăn kākĭlun yānī	Why is your mane on the side
Ălvăn olmush bir yānī	Stained with color on one side,
Măgăr bābām ülüb dī	Unless our father is dead?
Sĕnna qurbān Zul Jĕnāh	May we be your sacrifice, Zūl Jenāḥ!

Fătĭma nūr-i aini	'The light of Fatima's eyes,
Imām-i-săqăl aini	The leader of both worlds, [Hussein.
Ăjăb gĭtdün Husseini	It is strange that you have (not) brought
Sĕnna qurbān, Zul Jĕnāh!	May we be your sacrifice, Zūl Jenāḥ!'

II. The Lion of Kerbela

When Hussein and his followers lay dead and dying on the field, their slayers were about to ride over them, trampling them under their horses' feet. But Fizeh Khāṭūn, a negress who had been the slave of Fatima, prayed that a lion might be sent to protect them. The lion came, and the frightened horses ran from it, refusing to trample on the corpses of the martyrs. Every year in Tabriz a lion is carried about in the Moḥarram processions and is treated with reverence.[2] In accord with the usual practice of the Persians, who with childlike faith are ready to accept the commonest thing as emblem of a greater, the 'lion' is usually a moth-eaten wolf-skin, badly stuffed. When I first saw it, I took it for a dog! Many poems are addressed to the lion, of which the following is one of the best known:

Ei shīr, yĕtish būgun hĕrāyĕ	O Lion, come today to our help,
Imdād eile āl-ĭ Mustăfāyĕ	Help the children of Musṭafa!

Ei shīr bū gunde bāsha vur yān	O Lion, strike your head today, burn it!
Măhluq-i-jĕhān olub hĕrāsān	The people of the world are terrified.
Ekbĕr di olān qānĭne găltān	This is Akbar, stained with blood.
Ot săldi măqām-i-ămbēyāyĕ	He set fire to the place of the prophets.[3]
Ei shīr, yĕtish būgun hĕrāyĕ,	O Lion, come today to our help,
Imdād eile āl-ĭ Mustăfāyĕ	Help the children of Musṭafa!

Ei shīr bū Qāsĕm-i-jĕvān dur	O Lion, this is the young Qāsim,
Ăldă yākhĭlān hănăsi qān dur	The henna which colors his hand is blood.
Ăflākĕ chĕhub nă ăl ămān dur	What a cry 'Alas!' has started to the skies
Olād-i Ali düshüb bĕlāyĕ	The children of 'Alī have met disaster.
Ei shīr, yĕtish būgun, etc.	O Lion, come today, etc.

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[2] I have never seen the lion represented either in Teheran or Hamadan, where I have seen many Moharram processions.

[3] 'He set fire to the place of the prophets'; i. e. his death was a great sorrow to the prophets..

Gel qătli-gĭhĕ bir güzĕr eile	Come, pass by the place of slaughter,
Nă'sh-i shĕhādāyĕ năzăr eile	Look at the corpses of the martyrs.
Git shīr-i khodāye khăbēr eile	Go to the Lion of God, tell him.[4]
Ărz eile ke gelsun Kĕrbĕlāyĕ	Beg him to come to Kerbela.
Ei shīr, yĕtish būgun, etc.	O Lion, come today, etc.

Bū Asgher-i tifl-i shīr khārĕh	This child 'Asqar, a nursling,
Peikan boghazun kolubdi pāreh	The arrow has torn his throat.
Ăhvāle-i-nĕ eile bir năzārĕh	Look at his condition.
Sapdi babasi qānun hăvāyĕ	His father threw his blood into the air.[5]
Ei shīr, yĕtish būgun, etc.	O Lion, come today, etc.

Bākh Zeinăbĕ kalumyup pĕnāhī	Look at Zainab, shelterless.
Shimr ot lāde jumle khaimegāhi	Shimr fired all the tents.
Ulduldiler shāhi kăm pĕnāhī	They killed the king who had no shelter.
La'nat beile qom-i bi heiāyĕ	Curses on the shameless people!
Ei shīr, yĕtish būgun, etc.	O Lion, come today, etc.

Bākh kuh-i Mināde ākhdi qānlār	Look at the hill of Mīnāh, flowing with [blood.[6]
Chokh nōhĕlĕr etdi nohe khānlār	The mourners have made many wailings.
Qāsem toyena gelen jevānlār	The young men coming to Qāsim's wedding[7]
Mehman di hami bū qan ăzāyĕ	Are all guests at this bloody mourning.
Ei shīr, yĕtish būgun hĕrāyĕ,	O Lion, come today to our help,
Imdād eile āl-ĭ Mustăfāyĕ	Help the children of Muṣṭafa!

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[4] The Lion of God = 'Ali.

[5] The story is that Hussein took the baby 'Asqar in his arms and went to his enemies to beg that he might at least get water from the river for this child. For reply, an arrow was shot which lodged in the infant's throat. As the blood poured forth, the father caught some of it in his hand and tossed it in the air, calling on God to witness the cruel deed.

[6] The plain of Kerbela, flowing with the blood of the martyrs, is here compared to the hill of Mīnāh, near Mecca, where each pilgrim sacrifices a lamb or a sheep.

[7] The 10th of Moharram was the day of Qāsim's wedding.